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INCOMING TELEGRAM *Department of State* (548)

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REF: A. STATE 175133
B. SAIGON 23076
C. STATE 177722

1. WE ARE SEEKING FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE REPORT FROM KY THAT THE MILITARY HAVE CHOSEN HIM AS THEIR CANDIDATE. WE HAVE IN THE MEANTIME HAD TWO CONFIRMING REPORTS FROM SOURCES WHO WERE PRESENT AT THE MEETING OF THE GENERALS AT WHICH THE DECISION FOR KY WAS REPORTEDLY MADE. IN SUMMARY, A MEETING WAS REPORTEDLY CALLED BY GENERAL LOAN ON APRIL 17 AT WHICH KY, KHANG, THANG, BOTH VIENS AND TRI WERE PRESENT. LOAN TOLD THE GENERALS THAT HE HAD BEEN INFORMED THE FRENCH

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AND THE VIET CONG WOULD SUPPORT PHAN KHAC SUU AND THAT SINCE THE OPPOSITION WAS SOLIDIFYING AROUND HIM THE GENERALS MUST REACH A DECISION TO SUPPORT KY. REPORTEDLY THIS DECISION WAS REACHED WITH A MINIMUM OF DISCUSSION AND THANG WAS DETAILED TO INFORM THIEU, BUT DID NOT KNOW THAT THIS HAD BEEN DONE AS YET. WE HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO CONFIRM THIS LATTER POINT THROUGH OTHER SOURCES.

(1) 2. WHEN WE HAVE A CLEARER PICTURE OF THE SITUATION, WE WILL BE BETTER ABLE TO DECIDE WHETHER WE NEED AGAIN WARN THIEU AND KY OF THE DANGERS OF A SPLIT IN THE MILITARY (PARA 4 OF REFTEL C). IT REMAINS POSSIBLE THAT GENERAL THIEU AND HIS SUPPORTERS HAVE NOT AGREED OR WILL NOT AGREE THAT KY IS THE CHOICE OF THE MILITARY. IF KY AND HIS MEN ARE TRYING TO FORCE THIEU'S HAND, THIEU HAS THREE CHOICES: OF GOING ALONG QUIETLY, OF OPPOSING KY OPENLY OR OF OPPOSING KY QUIETLY. IF HE OPPOSES KY, HE MAY OF COURSE DO SO BY RUNNING HIMSELF OR BY SUPPORTING ANOTHER CANDIDATE.

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SAIGON 23486, 4-19-67, POL 14 VIET S

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Dan Agenbroad DATE 10/6/81
PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

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3. ALL OF THE ABOVE RAISES THE POSSIBILITY OF A POLITICAL

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STRUGGLE IN WHICH ONE PART OF THE ARMY IS OPPOSED TO ANOTHER PART. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THIS WOULD BE EXTREMELY DANGEROUS. AT THE LEAST IT WOULD BE LIKELY TO IMPAIR MILITARY DISCIPLINE AND DETRACT FROM THE WAR EFFORT. AT WORST IT COULD LEAD TO COUPS AND COUNTER COUPS AND REVIVE THE CHRONIC INSTABILITY FROM WHICH WE HAVE BEEN SPARED FOR ALMOST TWO YEARS. WE THINK THE THREAT OF SERIOUS DIVISION IN THE MILITARY IS MUCH THE SAME REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THIEU RUNS FOR PRESIDENT OR PRIME MINISTER SO LONG AS HE RUNS AGAINST ANOTHER TICKET HEADED BY KY. THE POINT IS THAT THIEU'S POLITICAL STRENGTH IS IN THE MILITARY, AND THAT IF HE RUNS AGAINST KY, IT IS THAT MILITARY STRENGTH WHICH HE WILL INEVITABLY BRING INTO CONFLICT WITH KY'S MILITARY SUPPORT. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THE MILITARY CAN SEPARATE THEIR POLITICAL AND MILITARY ROLES AS SUGGESTED PARA 8 REFERENCE A. NEITHER DO WE BELIEVE THEY CAN REDUCE THE DANGERS OF AN INTRA-MILITARY CONFLICT BY INVOLVING CIVILIANS IN THE CONFLICT AS SUGGESTED PARA 12 REFERENCE A.

4. FOLLOWING ARE OUR COMMENTS ON THE OTHER QUESTIONS

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RAISED IN REFERENCE A:

A. PARA 2 AND 3. BELIEVE SAIGON'S 23076, WHICH CROSSED REFERENCE A, ANSWERS THIS QUERY IN PART. IT DOES NOT NOW APPEAR LIKELY THAT THIEU WILL SEEK A PLACE ON A TICKET HEADED BY BIG MINH, AND IT MAY BE THAT HE NEVER SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED THIS IDEA. WE DO NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY, HOWEVER, THAT THIEU MAY OPPOSE KY'S CANDIDACY BY RUNNING AGAINST HIM ON A MIXED CIVILIAN-MILITARY SLATE, ALTHOUGH I DOUBT IT. SOME SORT OF A NOMINATING CIVILIAN SO-CALLED "CONGRESS" FOR THE MILITARY CANDIDATE IS AN IDEA APPARENTLY FAVORED BOTH KY AND THIEU. IF THIEU SHOULD DECIDE TO SUPPORT KY, WE ANTICIPATE THAT STEPS MAY BE TAKEN SOON TO GET IT STARTED. IF THIEU DOES NOT SUPPORT KY, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT NO SUCH "CONGRESS" WILL TAKE PLACE.

B. PARA 4 AND 5. GIVEN HUONG'S PERSONALITY AND REMEMBERING

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HIS REMARKS IN LATE FEBRUARY (SAIGON 19123), WE ARE STILL INCLINED TO DOUBT HE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN RUNNING FOR ANYTHING BUT PRESIDENT. HE MAY PREFER TO STEP ASIDE AS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE IN FAVOR OF PHAN KHAC SUU RATHER THAN TO ACCEPT A

LOWER SPOT ON A MILITARY TICKET. THERE IS A RUMOR (AND IT IS NOTHING MORE THAN THAT AT THIS STAGE) GOING THE ROUNDS IN SAIGON THAT HE MAY MAKE A DEAL WITH SUU WHICH WOULD INVOLVE HIS WITHDRAWAL FROM THE RACE IN ORDER TO AVOID SPLITTING THE SOUTHERN VOTE.

C. PARA 6. WE BELIEVE KY WOULD SEEK TO PREVENT BIG MINH FROM RETURNING TO VIET NAM. IN THIS HE WOULD BE SECONDED BY MANY OF THE OTHER GENERALS WHO WOULD SEE IN BIG MINH'S RETURN A THREAT THAT ALL OF THE EXILED GENERALS MIGHT BE COMING BACK AND DISPLACING THEM. BIG MINH IS POPULAR AMONG BOTH CIVILIANS AND MILITARY, BUT WE DO NOT BELIEVE HE WOULD REALISTICALLY EXPECT TO "RETURN ENTIRELY IN CIVILIAN CAPACITY".

D. PARA 7. LOAN'S ACTIONS IN THE SITUATION DESCRIBED IN PARA 7 WOULD DEPEND HEAVILY ON KY'S ATTITUDE. IF KY IS DETERMINED TO WIN, WE DO NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT LOAN WOULD TRY TO RIG THE ELECTIONS. KY'S RECENT STATEMENTS, BOTH IN PUBLIC AND TO ME IN PRIVATE, INDICATE THAT HE UNDERSTANDS THE IMPORTANCE OF CLEAN ELECTIONS, BUT IT IS HARD TO PREDICT WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN

IN THE HEAT OF A HARD FOUGHT, CLOSE ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

E. PARA 9. TWO COMPETING MILITARY TICKETS MIGHT ADD A SUPERFICIALLY ATTRACTIVE APPEARANCE OF COMPETITION TO THE UNTHINKING BUT AT THE EXPENSE OF A SERIOUSLY DIVIDED MILITARY, AS INDICATED IN PARA 3 ABOVE. WE DO NOT IN FACT BELIEVE THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO SUSPEND OR PUT ASIDE THE IMPORTANT FACTOR OF MILITARY UNITY SINCE THIS IS THE KEY TO THE WHOLE SITUATION. WITHOUT MILITARY UNITY, THERE IS LITTLE HOPE FOR POLITICAL STABILITY IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. WITHOUT POLITICAL STABILITY, IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE WHETHER OR NOT THE ELECTIONS ARE SOMEWHAT

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MORE APPEALING TO THE AVERAGE UNTHINKING VIETNAMESE.

F. PARA 10. WE HAVE SOME INDICATIONS THAT GENERAL MANH FAVORS THIEU, OR POSSIBLY PHAN KHAC SUU, OVER KY. GENERAL LAM IS BELIEVED TO FAVOR KY. VINH LOC APPEARS TO BE UNCOMMITTED. QUANG PROBABLY FAVORS THIEU OVER KY, BUT IS NOT LIKELY TO BE VERY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT EITHER ONE.

G. PARA 11. BELIEVE SAIGON 23076 ANSWERS THIS QUERY.

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BT

NOTE: Advance copy to S/S-O at 9:50 a.m., April 19.
Passed White House, CIA, DOD at 9:50 a.m., April 19.

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